

NFNPA 541/18

**NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
AUTHORITY MEETING – 22 MARCH 2018**

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

Report by: Alison Barnes, Chief Executive

Summary:

This report covers the period since the Authority meeting on 18 January 2018. The report has been formatted to accord with the 'Protect, Enjoy, Prosper and Aiming for Excellence' themes from the 2015-18 Business Plan, summarised below:

Protect	Enjoy	Prosper
<p><i>Our priorities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enhancing the New Forest's landscapes and habitats ▪ Ensuring new development is sympathetic and in keeping with its surrounding ▪ Conserving the historic and local way of life 	<p><i>Our priorities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enabling high quality experiences of the National Park ▪ Improving understanding of the National Park ▪ Managing recreation to benefit the National Park 	<p><i>Our priorities:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Supporting a distinctive and prosperous local economy ▪ Promoting sustainable transport ▪ Encouraging sustainable communities
<p>Aiming for Excellence</p>		
<p><i>In all we do:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Providing the highest quality of service ▪ Working with others in achieving maximum benefits for the National Park ▪ Using available resources effectively and efficiently 		

Recommendation:

To note the report

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Equality & Diversity Implications:

There are no equality or diversity implications arising directly from this report.

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Today, I'm pleased to be able to present you with our draft Business Plan 2018-21 and work programme for the coming year. The last quarter of 2017-18 has seen the finalisation of work we have done over the year with staff and members to refresh our business plan, reflecting the challenges and opportunities ahead for the next three years. While we continue to structure our work around our National Park purposes and duty under themes of Protect, Enjoy, Prosper and Achieving Excellence, we will also look to progress significant areas of work that cut across our themes including data and evidence to inform decisions; the future of land management and land use; engaging with people and the next generation of custodians; and developing our team and partnerships to meet the challenges and opportunities ahead.

Our plan also reflects Government's aspiration, as set out in the recent 25 Year Plan for the Environment, that natural capital is put at the heart of all decisions. It is appropriate that the New Forest - one of our most precious landscapes yet surrounded by large communities – is at the forefront of putting these ambitions into practice.

Our planning role remains central to how we protect the National Park and ensure it is able to face future challenges. This month we attended the launch of the consultation of a refreshed National Planning Policy Framework and are working with colleagues across the National Parks to prepare a response by 10 May. It is interesting to note the continued recognition of National Parks as requiring the highest level of protection and the commitment to achieve 'net gain for the environment' from development.

We're in the final stages of reviewing our own planning policies and nearly 200 responses were received during the recent consultation on this draft Local Plan. The draft, with the supporting evidence base and all of the final consultation responses, will be submitted to the Secretary of State for independent examination by the end of April.

We have also continued to play our part this quarter in influencing the future of land management schemes post Brexit, working with partners to host a visit by Defra officials involved in shaping these schemes. This was a very positive step in our work to secure a bespoke scheme for the Forest when we leave Europe.

We continued the focus on trees and woodlands this quarter, protecting and enhancing New Forest's distinctive character trees, woodlands and hedgerows. The tree team registered a high volume of tree work applications both within the National Park and District Council area with 187 applications in the first two months of the year; 10 Tree Preservation Orders were also made. Significant practical management work was undertaken under the Our Past Our Future Working Woodlands project and the 4km target for hedgerow restoration from the Better Boundaries Project reached. In addition, the Green Halo Partnership has led to dialogue between private woodland owners and Forestry Commission about how management the extensive woodlands beyond the Open Forest can be supported.

Archaeological features are an important part of the National Park's heritage. Views are being sought on a draft New Forest archaeological research strategy for the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic periods (around 500,000 years ago to about 4,000 BC). This will help guide volunteers and universities in their research priorities and will help commercial organisations understand local needs.

The role of volunteers in helping us care for the New Forest is vital and we were delighted that nearly 600 people turned out to our Volunteer Fair in January to sign up to opportunities from nearly 50 organisations. Here we launched the #pledge10000 challenge and have already seen 2,700 hours pledged since the event. We also held a volunteer celebration for those who are taking part in the Heritage Lottery Fund projects and supported training for volunteers running 'walking for health' groups.

Another community volunteer initiative organised this quarter was the Great British Spring Clean weekend with over 20 public litter picking events planned in the New Forest as part of the national initiative on the first weekend in March. Unfortunately the snow arrived, meaning they had to be postponed, but most are being rescheduled over the coming weeks, including a coastal litter pick being organised with HCC for 17 March.

Our education staff had an incredible response to their offer of providing litter assemblies, on the theme of 'Plastic Planet'. A staggering 13,500 children from 61 schools will be looking at ways they can reduce plastic waste in our Forest, rivers and sea. Meanwhile we are supporting 'Refill New Forest', part of a national campaign to offer people free tap water refills around the National Park to reduce waste from plastic bottles. So far 30 businesses have signed up and will display a sticker and be listed on the Refill app to show their involvement.

Finally, preparations are well underway for the spring and summer schedule of engagement and outreach to spread the all-important 'care for' messages out in the Forest. The new look Essential Guide and refreshed Pocket Guide are ready for distribution and our new website goes live in the next few weeks. We have 3 new seasonal rangers who will shortly be working on the Ground Nesting Birds campaign and were delighted that New Forest Dog Owners Group helped fund one of these posts, increasing our ability to engage with people at this important time of year. We look forward to working with our partners over the critical period of the coming months to increase people's understanding just how special the New Forest is and how to look after it.

DELIVERY OF NATIONAL PARK PURPOSES AND FUNCTIONS

The report has been formatted to accord with the 'Protect, Enjoy, Prosper' objectives from the 2015-18 Business Plan, a summary of which is set out on the first page. In addition, a fourth section, 'Aiming for Excellence', summarises those activities that support and contribute overall to all our work, and the final section lists Members' activities and events.

1 **Protect**

1.1 **Enhancing the Forest's landscapes and habitats**

Archaeology

The draft New Forest archaeological research strategy for the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic periods, from around 500,000 years ago to about 4,000 BC is now informing planning related work for the proposed undergrounding of the high voltage electricity cables across Hale Purlieu and the archaeological assessment work for the former Fawley Power Station site. The strategy was recently issued for comment at the January Community Heritage Forum, established under the heritage projects of the OPOF Landscape Partnership Scheme. Local groups and individuals have been asked for their comment and views.

The riverine gravel terraces from the Avon Valley to similar deposits along the coast at Fawley contain a rich assemblage of artefacts associated with our Neanderthal ancestors and modern humans. This strategy is one of a series of reviews of the existing knowledge base that will be regularly updated to reflect new data and results from current archaeological work.

- The strategy hopes to provide a guide for the voluntary sector to channel their energies into useful fields of enquiry.
- It will assist commercial organisations in meeting the requirements of planning conditions and related work, where firms are required to be familiar with local needs.
- It will enable academic institutions to prioritise their own research programmes, and to gain necessary approvals for work within the Forest from land managers and Government agencies.

The preparation of the strategy has resulted in greater awareness of privately and publicly held collections of archaeological material previously not previously reported on. These add to our knowledge of the distant past of the New Forest area; information that will enhance the HCC public Historic Environment Record and the New Forest Knowledge web site www.nfknowledge.org

Our Past, Our Future (OPOF) Landscape Partnership Scheme

A Board meeting was held in February to consider progress. A key area for discussion was funding. The current matched funding shortfall has now been reduced to £23,175. Funding currently being sought which has a 'high likelihood' of success totals up to £31,000, and that which has a 'medium likelihood' of success totals up to £21,500. Therefore the risk of a final matched funding shortfall is now seen as being low. The funding situation will be kept under ongoing review and if necessary the partners will consider providing a percentage share of the shortfall should it be required. This will be reviewed again at the next Board meeting in May.

The Board members are keen to start to consider future partnership working and will be checking the level of internal support for a partnership initiative within their individual organisations, and for an initial meeting to discuss the potential of such a partnership as well as its key objectives.

External consultants, Resources for Change, are in the process of undertaking a mid-term evaluation of the scheme. They have conducted interviews with project leads and beneficiaries and ran a useful workshop on 7 February with the scheme partners. They presented the headline findings from the interviews and other work that they have carried out over the last few months. They also presented their initial analysis and draft recommendations for us to take forward over the remaining term of the scheme. This focused on four key themes:

1. Volunteering
2. Audiences
3. Behaviour Change
4. Legacy (at various levels i.e.: Landscape, Partnership and Projects)

Resources for Change will now produce an Evaluation Report, which will include more detail on the analysis and the recommendations and we can then consider how best to take these forward. It is likely that we will have another workshop run by Resources for Change to specifically look at the legacy recommendations that have arisen from the evaluation.

The evaluation that Resources for Change have carried out focuses on scheme wide issues, in addition the project team will be carrying out a more detailed review of project progress, budgets and targets over the next couple of months.

A fourth OPOF Newsletter has been produced which provides updates on some of the 21 projects in the Scheme. In particular it covers events that took place last year that helped to celebrate the Charter of the Forest and also takes a look at some of the great work that has been undertaken by volunteers over the past two years.

All partners are continuing to progress their projects.

HLF has released a consultation on their Strategic Funding Framework. This will determine how it will distribute its good causes money from 2019 until 2024 including Landscape Partnership Schemes. The NFNPA will be responding to the consultation and HLF is also encouraging individuals to respond to the consultation through a shorter response form. The closing date for comments is 22 March.

National Grid Visual Impact Provision (VIP) and Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) programmes.

In January a meeting was held in Winchester between National Grid, its ecological consultants, Natural England and National Trust; the NPA Ecologist and Landscape Officer were also in attendance. Natural England gave advice to National Grid on the subject of compensatory habitat and IROPI (Imperative Reason of Overriding Public Interest) for the potential undergrounding of the high voltage power line at Hale Purlieu. Natural England also advised on what information would need to be forthcoming from National Grid, as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment, for Natural England to be able to give its opinion of the viability of any proposals to us as part of the planning process.

In February, National Grid held a Stakeholder Reference Group Meeting at Lyndhurst Community Centre to update the local representatives of the following organisations on the progress of the investigations into possible undergrounding of the high voltage line at Hale

Purlieu; National Trust, Natural England, Verderers, National Park Authority, Forestry Commission. National Grid was keen to agree a route across Hale Purlieu so that further investigations can be concentrated in one area (e.g. bore holes and trail pits that investigate geology).

National Grid stated that it is planning to hold a drop-in event in September 2018 for members of the public to find out more about its investigations and progress with the project. National Grid is hoping to submit a planning application to us in December 2018.

We have received the first part of the £33,000 grant from National Grid's Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI) for the woodland improvements at Warrens Copse, Holbury and this will now trigger the appointment of a contractor to carry out the replacement fencing, footpath, steps and culvert improvements work. As this payment has been considerably delayed, the footpath improvements works will now have to be put off until late August/September to avoid the bird nesting season in the woodland. This will be advantageous as conditions underfoot are currently very wet and damage to the woodland floor and existing footpaths would be likely if the work was carried out now.

The LEI funding bid for Wiltshire Wildlife Trust's Landford Bog Nature Reserve is progressing well with an 'Expression of Interest' (EOI) application submitted. Wiltshire Wildlife Trust has agreed the details of the application with us which include: log dams to help 're-wet' the bog which has been slowly drying out, replacing stock fencing, creating a boardwalk where an existing footpath goes over wet ground, coppicing willow and removing invasive non-native plant species. We have to make the application on behalf of Wiltshire Wildlife Trust as part of the LEI funding conditions. The EOI will be scrutinised by the LEI panel and it will decide if the application can go forward to the next stage as a full application. The timetable for this approval is not yet clear from National Grid.

New Forest Land Advice Service

In January the New Forest Future Farming Group, made up of the CDA, Verderers, NFNPA, NFLAS, FC, CLA, NFU and NE (chaired by Oliver Crosthwaite-Eyre), hosted a visit to the New Forest for three staff members from Defra:

Marie Southgate – Deputy Director, Land Use Policy
Guy Horsington – Deputy Director, Future Farming Policy
Sarah Severn – Deputy Director, Rural Policy Team

This was in response to the letter the group wrote to Lord Gardiner last summer, asking him to work with the group to ensure appropriate levels and delivery of funding to support land management after Britain leaves the EU.

We organised for the Defra Directors to be taken on a range of visits including to farms, commoners holdings, the Beaulieu Road sales yard, a wetland restoration and the Verderers Court so that they met and spoke to a wide range of relevant people and organisations.

Core NFLAS work

During this period the advisors have worked with 29 commoners and eight other farmers/landowners. This has involved the usual wide variety of advice and support including:

- Grant opportunities and applications e.g. Countryside Stewardship (including Hedgerows and Boundaries Grant and Catchment Sensitive Farming grants), National Trust small grant scheme, RDPE (Leader)
- Habitat management advice e.g. hedgerows, ponds

- Nitrate Vulnerable Zone advice and paperwork
- Basic Payment Scheme support and paperwork

Our work with farmers and commoners to prevent the pollution of rivers and streams through the Catchment Sensitive Farming strand of Countryside Stewardship has continued this quarter at four farms near Lyndhurst and Beaulieu. Our advice is to carry out complex yard and drainage alterations and build new infrastructure to prevent nitrate run off into nearby rivers and streams and livestock poaching of the farmland and New Forest Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). This involves long term and in-depth partnership working between the farmer/commoner, Natural England and our planning officers.

NFLAS *Our Past, Our Future* projects

New Forest Rural Skills

We arranged for all the people on the Commoners' Mentor Scheme to be given the opportunity to visit the Stallion Scheme and have a tour and talk from Head Agister Jonathan Gerelli and Verderer Jim Greenwood. 13 people signed up for the visit which was on a Saturday afternoon.

Two courses were run during this quarter: Chainsaw Level 2 Processing Small Trees and our annual hedgelaying course which was carried out, as always, on one of our Better Boundaries hedges, this time in Hyde.

Better Boundaries

Now that the practical work season has come to an end we have almost completed the 4km target of hedgerow restoration. With just some small sections of planting left to complete, which can be carried out in March and April, the project looks set to be the first one to finish in the OPOF scheme. One of our hedgelayers, Andy Birnie, has been hard at work for three months laying a 380 metre long hedgerow in Hyde.

Working Woodlands

Tom Murphy has left the project to work full time in his woodland management business on the Isle of Wight. We have recruited Gemma Stride from the Forestry Commission on secondment to work on the project part time from mid-April for 13 months. In the meantime the NFLAS staff have been managing ongoing woodland work and a lot of practical management has been carried out by both contractors and volunteers over the past three months. This includes thinning of a woodland near Pilley where the timber will be extracted by horses later in the year, rhododendron removal near Walhampton, thinning of Warren Copse at Holbury and extensive Turkey Oak removal at a holding adjacent to Rockford Common.

Growing the Forest and Ecology

We have started to collaborate with OPOF's Traditional Building Skills project by creating a new wildlife focused presentation which will now be delivered as part of all future homeowner and professional skills courses.

New Forest Catchment Partnership

We facilitated a meeting of the Partnership in January which allowed stakeholders and partners to communicate their work in delivery projects with local landowners and volunteers as well as monitoring wetland restoration schemes. Projects have also been raising awareness of the importance of the freshwater environment in the New Forest and how everyone can help by avoiding pollution from the water disposal from their homes. Further campaigns to help are being planned with business partners (e.g. Southern Water) and other Catchments. The Partnership

has also identified future priorities for action which will inform bids to the new Water Environment Grants available from the Environment Agency later in the spring.

Partners are working in response to evidence that shows the decline in water quality of Hatchet Pond, which is one of the most valuable freshwater waterbodies in England but is currently facing threats from a number of sources. A successful public consultation has been undertaken during the period by partners. This has found positive support for key principles of improving water quality as well as allowing understanding of local views. Water quality testing by the Catchment Partnership in the past helped to identify the issues and prompt work to find solutions.

Evidence base – Local Biological Records Centres

The period saw extensive liaison with Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre, based at Hampshire County Council. We met to review last year's habitat surveys and scope sites for survey this year, many of which support and inform the operation of the Our Past, Our Future project delivery. We have been negotiating a renewal of our service level agreement with the Information Centre and assessing how increased costs, due to the need for the Centre to meet escalating Hampshire County Council costs, can be accommodated in forthcoming years.

Liaison with academic sector

In support of the role the academic sector has in our work, including Our Past, Our Future, we have been working with Southampton University to aid delivery of their New Forest course module which they will undertake work at Avon Tyrrell and Warrens Copse. Both sites are linked to the OPOF work. During the period we have been liaising with staff and gave a seminar to students to introduce them to our work in protecting wildlife.

Supporting biodiversity through planning roles

During the period (six weeks between mid-January and end of February) we received 17 formal consultations in respect of NFNPA planning as well as other enquiries. A total of 35 applications were screened as having potential wildlife impacts. During the same period we received 34 consultations requests from NFDC as well as other requests for input to other cases. 63 applications were screened as having potential wildlife implications.

There has been significant and ongoing input into larger developments such as Fawley Waterside and Fordingbridge allocations during the period. We have also been engaged with partners and policy officers to address air quality impacts on wildlife sites in the Park as well as the mitigation of visitor pressure on important bird populations.

We have been successful in securing some compensation for the loss of swift habitats in buildings in new developments. We are working in partnership with the Hampshire Swift Project to try to ensure developments show regard to the conservation of this vulnerable species and to use future planning guidance to help achieve this.

1.2 Ensuring new development is sympathetic and in keeping with its surroundings

Development Management

We have received 159 applications since the beginning of the year (in the period 3 January to 9 March) and in the same period determined 125 applications with an approval rate of 82%. Significant applications determined in this period include proposals at Broadbridge Farm and the scoping opinion to inform the EIA to accompany the application for the redevelopment of Fawley Power Station.

Pre-application discussions are continuing with Fawley Waterside Limited in relation to these proposals, including meetings with key statutory consultees.

Eight appeal decisions have been received since the last meeting; five dismissed and three allowed.

Emma MacWilliam will be leaving the planning team at the end of March. An internal advertisement has been sent out for this planning officer role.

Enforcement and Trees

During January and February we have investigated and closed 51 enforcement cases which resulted in the service of four Enforcement Notices directed against the most harmful breaches of planning control and the resolution of 44 cases through planning permission or the negotiated removal of unauthorised development. We also secured compliance with one Enforcement Notice directed at the removal of a horse drawn carriage and other vehicles from the land. Furthermore we have been to Court and secured two successful prosecutions against owners who failed to comply with Enforcement Notices. Both parties were ordered to pay a fine and our costs. It is now expected that those Enforcement Notices will be complied with in the coming weeks.

We have registered a high volume of tree work applications for the National Park and surrounding New Forest District areas at 187 during January and February. We have also made 10 Tree Preservation Orders to protect trees of high amenity value that were otherwise under threat from new development or inappropriate works.

Policy

The final six week public consultation on our proposed Submission draft Local Plan 2016 – 2036 ran from 17 January to 28 February. Everyone who had engaged in the Local Plan process to date was directly notified of this final period of consultation, as well as statutory and other consultees. During the consultation responses were received from just under 200 separate representations - including local residents, parish councils, neighbouring planning authorities, landowners and statutory consultees. All of the representations received will be considered and the intention is to submit the draft Local Plan, the supporting evidence base, and all of the representations received during this final consultation period to the Secretary of State for independent examination at the end of April 2018.

On 5 March the Government published its proposed amendments to national planning policy, contained within a revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and associated documents. The key driver behind the proposed revisions is to increase the level of housebuilding in England to meet identified housing needs. We attended the Government's launch of the revised Framework and the proposed revisions have been discussed at both the National Park Authority Heads of Planning and the National Parks Officers Group meetings in the week the consultation was launched. We are likely to be feeding into a combined National Parks England response on the proposals by the deadline of 10 May 2018.

1.3 Conserving the historic environment and local way of life

Design advice and guidance

The team has been providing with design advice on planning applications across the National Park. In addition to the work on heritage matters, the team also comments on design issues on

other sites in larger schemes and those in sensitive locations. Fawley Waterside has taken up quite a bit of time and the team has been working on the emerging masterplan with the current site owner and his design team. Several schemes for new housing and affordable housing developments have received design advice and guidance over the first quarter.

In addition to this advice the team runs the Authority's annual building design awards which assists in raising the profile of good design across the New Forest to be awarded at this Authority meeting. These awards illustrate our commitment to good design and recognises applicants that have put in additional effort to improve the design and appearance of developments.

Conservation Area Action Plan for the Western Escarpment Conservation Area

The Western Escarpment Conservation Area Steering Group met in Ellingham on 29 January. The Steering Group is keen to update the existing Conservation Area Action Plan, which covered the period 2012 – 2017. A revised Action Plan has been prepared, which is a more succinct document and aims to focus on the areas where the Steering Group can make a real difference in conserving and enhancing the character of the area. The town and parish councils on the Steering Group are currently considering the updated Action Plan and the intention is to present it at the full Authority meeting in July for formal adoption.

2 Enjoy

2.1 Enabling high quality experiences of the National Park

Outreach, health and wellbeing

We are working with Exmoor NPA, Dartmoor NPA and Public Health England to support an initiative led by Exeter University on mental health and the natural environment. A network is proposed to bring together researchers from environmental, mental health and other disciplines with partners to debate, challenge and progress the current state of the evidence and action in this area. The key aim of the network is to address the question: '*How can we work better across sectors and disciplines to understand and capitalise on the value of natural environments for mental health, for mutual benefit?*' This opportunity arose from the joint working group of Southern National Parks and Public Health England which was set up in response to the National accord between National Parks England and Public Health England.

In quarter three over 1,600 hours were recorded walking for health in the Health Walks programme that we support. Volunteer hours totalled over 700 and the rangers assisted with delivering training to walk leaders.

Volunteer Fair

Almost 600 people came along looking to try something new through one of the hundreds of roles on offer from 46 local organisations. The event also saw the launch of the #pledge10000 campaign.

Almost 2,700 hours have been pledged so far by potential volunteers towards achieving a target of 10,000 hours of volunteering in 2018 to help protect the National Park and support local communities.

The fair was opened by local volunteer Patrick Keane, from Brockenhurst, who contributed over 1,000 hours over the last two years, helping catalogue and scan documents for the New Forest

Knowledge online portal as part of the Heritage Lottery Fund Our Past, Our Future landscape partnership scheme.

2.2 Improving understanding of the National Park

Public and community events / rangers

Public engagement work is ongoing with partners such as along the coast at Lepe Country Park and Milford on Sea with Bird Aware Solent. Joint events and patrols have educated users about the importance of winter wading birds and encouraged responsible behaviour to reduce the impact of disturbance.

Considerable planning is being put in to this year's ground nesting bird awareness work. As usual we are working with Forestry Commission, National Trust and Hampshire County Council but we have also had some very constructive dialogue with Wild New Forest about using their 2016/17 data to guide engagement on sites with ground-nesting waders. In addition to the usual ground nesting bird awareness sessions across the Forest, we are proposing to select two locations, where there is known GNB activity and provide an enhanced level of engagement. More specific and regular up to date info about current GNB activity in that location will be provided and signage that helps walkers and other users to choose a route that does not take them into/near to sensitive areas. We will monitor what effect we have on user's behaviour to help review effectiveness and shape future approaches.

Rangers continue to support OPOF Working Woodlands project assisting with practical sessions and working with volunteers.

Education and ranger staff held a joint event at Lymington Library during February half term. The nationally available Mission Explore Book contains a series of fun challenges or 'missions' to encourage families to partake in activities they could do in any National Park. Ideas for missions for the New Forest included developing a local event for the New Forest, making sheep out of wool sourced from Aubury Farm Keyhaven and finding places around the National Park using map reading skills and a geocaching trail around the Library; participants collected a reference point directing them up to St Barbe Museum, which was offering 50% discount on admission to any families taking part. A total of 30 intrepid adventurers took part on the day, all of whom received their free Mission Explore book, and a further 50 books were left with the library for all those young at heart explorers who couldn't make it on the day.

The Apprentice Rangers were able to give students an insight on what apprenticeships were really like when they assisted on our stand at Brockenhurst Apprenticeship Fair on 7 March. It was good to meet so many interested local young people and promote the partnership of our New Forest Apprentice Ranger project funded through OPOF.

Interpretation projects

We have progressed developing an interpretive trail with UK Youth at Avon Tyrell as part of our work to interpret the special qualities of the Forest and the Our Past, Our Future scheme. A new multi-use trail will be based on a STOP - SPOT - LEARN - DO activity. It will encourage visiting groups and campers to explore the habitats of the site and how they are being managed, as well as its interesting history.

Communications

We have produced a new Essential Guide magazine for visitors and an updated Pocket Guide jointly with the Forestry Commission to help visitors learn more about the National Park, to encourage them to care for the Forest and to promote our events.

We helped promote the Our Past, Our Future scheme, with a newsletter and a volunteer celebration event at Brockenhurst and blog posts from the Commoners Defence Association project and focussing on non-native plants project by the Wildlife Trust.

Our apprentice rangers were the focus of the Tesco Bags for Help in-store fundraising campaign which we helped promote and are awaiting the results of. The apprentices also took over the NPA Instagram account during National Apprenticeship Week to show young people and potential employers the benefits of the scheme.

We launched the six-week draft Local Plan consultation with social media posts, a press release, web pages and online response survey.

Working with the District Council, Forestry Commission, CDA and Verderers, we launched the Great British Spring Clean litter event in Milford. More than 12 community groups contacted NFDC to ask for equipment to stage their own litter collection event. The National Trust organised four public litter picks on its land, the Forestry Commission organised six on the Crown lands and Hampshire County Council organised events at Lepe and Keyhaven. Unfortunately many of the events had to be postponed due to the snow but the majority are still going ahead, spread over the following three weeks.

Formal education

The 2017-18 Travel Grant Scheme has this year enabled 3,000 pupils from 53 schools to take part in educational visits to the New Forest National Park. The children and young people visited 18 different members of the New Forest educator's forum, all specialists in different aspects of outdoor education. Many headteachers echoed the words of the group leader from Fawley Infant School: the grant 'enabled us to subsidise our trip, making it much more affordable for our families. This meant that all children in the school participate', and from Marchwood Junior School: 'the scheme is much appreciated. Thank you.'

The Education team has worked this term with 385 pupils from eight schools. By far the most requested theme was the Special Qualities of the National Park, a reflection of the welcome inclusion of a study of National Parks in the national primary school curriculum.

The highlight of the term for the three of us has been the amazing response to our 2018 Litter Assembly, Plastic Planet. A staggering 13,500 children from 61 schools will be considering ways in which they can help minimise the plastic waste in our Forest, rivers and sea.

2.3 Managing recreation to benefit the National Park

Recreation Management

Following the production of the two reports about the 'call for views' consultation to inform an update of the New Forest National Park Recreation Management Strategy 2010-2030, all six organisations on the RMS Steering Group (Forestry Commission, Natural England, Verderers, Hampshire County Council, NPA and New Forest District Council) have recommitted to working in partnership on this important topic. Potential actions are now being drafted, especially to

reflect the themes that came out of the consultation feedback (raising awareness and understanding, managing where recreation takes place and resources). Further work is being undertaken to increase our understanding of the demand for recreation and its impacts. Local planning authorities, led by Test Valley Borough Council, have successfully bid for £250,000 to improve the evidence base for impacts on the New Forest Special Protection Area from increases in housing development, so it is likely that this work will also help inform the RMS work.

Natural England's proposed route for the England Coast Path between Highcliffe and Calshot is due to be announced on 14 March. There will then be an eight week period for representations and objections; these will be collated and provided to Defra officials for consideration. The decision by the Secretary of State may follow towards the end of 2018, or in 2019. Only then would the NPA's work to implement the route start. Officers attended a meeting with neighbouring access authorities to discuss the most efficient maintenance arrangements for the new trail once established. A trail partnership stretching from Highcliffe (or Poole) to Brighton may be the best option.

Educational campaigns

Publicity from the autumn/winter campaign to reduce the number of animal accidents has continued – the temporary blue and white signs on high risk routes will be taken down now that we are past the worst time of year. In 2017, 56 animals were killed and a further 23 were injured. The number of animals grazing on the Forest has risen significantly in recent years, which increases the likelihood of accidents. However, the percentage killed fell to a new low of 0.43% (one out of every 233 animals). Using just data from ponies, the percentage killed fell to 0.70% (one out of every 142 animals). We will continue to look for further opportunities to encourage more responsible driving.

Three staff from UK Cycling Events, the company that runs the largest of the cycle events across the New Forest, attended the January meeting of the New Forest Association of Local Councils. They gave a presentation on their plans for 2018 (including a commitment to provide rear numbers for all riders) and answered questions.

The jointly planned and promoted New Forest Spring Clean weekend coincided with the arrival of Storm Emma, so very little litter picking could be done. Some communities were in any case planning their litter picks for later in the spring, and a replacement weekend will be found for those that were cancelled. A joint coastal litter pick has been re arranged with Hampshire County Council for 17 March.

The Dogs Forum met and among other topics discussed draft wording for a Professional Dog Walkers' Charter. We know of over 50 dog walking businesses in the New Forest and intend to discuss with them how they can demonstrate their commitment to the Forest environment, other people and their dogs, and the welfare of the dogs they walk.

As reported under Protect, we gained support for plans to use the NPA's habitat mitigation funds during the coming year. The work will include seasonal rangers (see below), a range of publications and social media work, and the production of films highlighting the presence and vulnerability of ground nesting birds.

The committee of New Forest Dog Owners Group have offered to part-fund a seasonal ranger who would promote responsible dog walking. This welcome offer coincides with the recruitment of other seasonal rangers (funded by NPA habitat mitigation contributions, Camping in the Forest and Forestry Commission) and we are pleased to have found a total of three good

candidates. Together they will greatly increase our presence on the ground, raising awareness of nesting birds and other special features of the New Forest, engaging with campers and generally promoting responsible recreation.

New Forest Access Forum

The Access Forum met at Hobourne Bashley on Monday 12 March. John Truswell from Natural England attended to give an update on the England Coast Path. There were also updates on the New Forest Mitigation Strategy and Recreation Management Strategy. The Forum discussed Brexit and developing the Forum's response to the Defra Future for food, farming and the environment consultation in particular what provision may be made for supporting public access to the countryside when Britain leaves the European Union. Bruce Rothnie from the Forestry Commission gave a 40 minute presentation on Managing Recreation – Sharing the care of the Forest which provoked considerable subsequent discussion.

3 Prosper

3.1 Supporting a distinctive and prosperous local economy

We met with staff from Go New Forest, which has replaced the New Forest Tourism Association. Our role is to encourage and enable them to protect the Forest by including in their publications and communications information about the things that make the New Forest special and messages about responsible recreation. We will be providing them with advice about their website and later in the year, will offer training sessions for accommodation providers and staff from visitor attractions.

3.2 Improving affordable housing provision

The National Park Authority continues to work with local communities, the Hampshire Alliance for Rural Affordable Housing (HARAH) and New Forest District Council (as the housing authority for the majority of the National Park) to deliver affordable housing for local people within the National Park. Through our Local Plan Review, we are also proposing a range of planning policy approaches that would increase the delivery of affordable housing for local people. This includes: (i) a limited number of proposed housing allocations where our evidence base illustrates that on-site affordable housing can be viably delivered; (ii) a proposed lowering of the site-size threshold for the delivery of affordable housing – meaning that smaller development sites would be required to support affordable housing provision (either through on-site provision, or contributions to support delivery elsewhere in the National Park); and (iii) continued planning policy support for the delivery of rural exception sites.

3.3 Promoting sustainable transport

Visitor bus services

New Forest Tour sponsors have mostly been confirmed. A new Gold supporting partner for 2018 is Adventure Golf, which has made extra effort to promote sustainable travel around the National Park through the inclusion of a miniature New Forest Tour vehicle as a feature on its course; the Tour green route will also serve this location. Other changes involve the Tour blue route taking an alternative route between Holmsley and Bashley and not serving Keyhaven on account of previous movement restrictions and low boarding numbers. As the original Beach Bus is no longer a viable route for the operator, plans are being finalised for a short, frequent service between the Waterside and Lepe Country Park. Route and site surveys at Lepe have been undertaken and the operator is intending to register this service in May.

3.4 Encouraging sustainable communities

Sustainable Communities Fund

Funds of £2,000 have enabled the purchase of a new total station through LoCATE (Local Community Archaeological Training and Equipment), a partnership between Bournemouth University and New Forest National Park Authority working with archaeological societies and community groups from across Hampshire and Dorset. A total station (total station theodolite) is an electronic/optical instrument used for surveying and building construction. The project aims to support the research that local groups already do by extending the range of techniques and skills they can use and help them to care for the New Forest environment. The total station will help groups to carry out landscape surveys, building recording and small scale survey and monitoring, and the results will be made publicly available (unless there are special requirements from landowners) via the New Forest Knowledge website. Over 20 local businesses have now signed up to the Refill New Forest scheme run by New Forest Transition. The scheme promotes free tap-water refill points within cafes, shops, businesses and transport hubs. Around 7 local schools are also taking part and encouraging their students to carry refillable bottles to help reduce single-use plastic.

4 Aiming for Excellence

4.1 Providing the highest quality of service

Meetings and Authority membership

Support to members and teams across the corporate structure has included support to the Authority and committee meetings, Members' Days and briefings, Executive Board, All Staff team meetings and Managers Forum. The majority of new members have now received their induction training with National Parks UK and it has been suggested to NPUK that refresher training be offered to all NPA members. In line with new Data Protection requirements all members will be provided with an individual NPA e-mail account which will be separate from their personal e-mail accounts – we will be providing members with more details of this change shortly. A new members' allowance scheme has been recommended by the Standards Committee for approval at the Authority meeting on 22 March, this four year scheme will commence on 1 April 2018 and will link increases in members' allowances to any increases in staff pay over the period. A Members' Day was held on Thursday 8 March to update members on the Authority's Recreation Management Strategy and the England Coast Path.

Information Management and Data Protection

Preparations for the new General Data Protection Regulation, which comes into force on 25 May 2018, are progressing and compliance with our data protection obligations are detailed as a new priority in the 2018 – 19 Work Programme. As part of this the Corporate Services Team is conducting information audits and reviewing policies, procedures and templates to ensure compliance. The team is also working with the ICT Team to help deliver the Office 365 project. The new electronic systems will support the wider records management overhaul that the Corporate Services Team is undertaking, which will further support GDPR compliance and deliver wider efficiency gains going forward.

4.2 Working with others in achieving maximum benefits for the National Park

Working with Partners

We continue to respond to and arrange requests for public speaking by local organisations on a range of topics. Support is provided for parish quadrant meetings and external partners such as the New Forest Marque, Access Forum and Consultative Panel. The meeting of the New Forest Consultative Panel due to be held on 1 March had to be postponed due to the bad weather and will now take place on Thursday 19 April. The election of the new Chairman of the Panel will be held at that meeting; applications for this position have been received from Peter Hebard, Ann Sevier and Harry Oram and voting will be by secret ballot at the meeting.

4.3 Using available resources effectively and efficiently

Human Resources

As at 28 February 2018 the total staff headcount was 89 or 78.16 full-time equivalents (FTEs).

	Headcount	Variation from previous report	FTE	Variation from previous report
Core funded	72*	0	63.34*	0
Funded by external projects	17	- 1	14.82	- 0.6
Total	89	- 1	78.16	- 0.6

*Of the core funded roles, 10 staff (8.92 FTEs) are working in shared services, 25 are part-time and three are on a fixed-term contract to provide maternity cover.

Recently we said goodbye to Tom Murphy (Project Co-ordinator – Working Woodlands). We wish him well in his future ventures.

Recruitment is currently underway for:

Job title	Contract type	How funded
Seasonal Assistant Rangers x 3	Fixed-term, full-time	Jointly funded by the Authority, Camping in the Forest, the Forestry Commission and NFD OG

ICT Services

The ICT team have completed the roll out of new PCs and Windows 10, and the new Intranet has also been completed. An interactive screen has now been installed in the Anderwood conference room to facilitate both internal and external meetings with partners. A number of lunch time workshops have been held to help users make best use of Windows 10 and the interactive screen. Installing security patches for our systems and IT security continues to take high priority. The team is making plans to progress a new records management system using Office 365.

5 Members

5.1 Some Members were involved in some or all of the following meetings and events

- Resources, Audit and Performance Committee – 5 February
- Planning Committee – 20 February
- Consultative Panel – 1 March
- Resources, Audit and Performance Committee – 5 March
- RMS Members Day – 8 March
- Planning Committee – 20 March

5.2 Forthcoming activities include:

- Planning Committee – 17 April
- Planning Committee – 15 May
- Resources, Audit and Performance Committee – 4 June
- Consultative Panel – 7 June
- Members Day – 12 June
- Planning Committee – 19 June

5.3 Chief Executive's engagements

- HIOW CX meeting – 19 January
- NPE Board meeting – 25 January
- Visit by Defra – 26 January
- Volunteer Fair – 28 January
- British Guild of Travel Writers AGM & Gala Dinner – 30 January
- South East and London FWACs joint meeting – 1 February
- NFA presentation – 2 February
- Meeting with NFDC – 5 February
- Business South HR Forum – 8 February
- Hampshire Environment Leaders meeting – 9 February
- Meeting with Natural England – 9 February
- Leadership Group meeting – 13 February
- Meeting with Deputy Surveyor – 13 February
- Joint PHE / NPE workshop – 15 February
- Speaker at Geovate 2018 – 16 February
- NPUK Executive meeting – 20 February
- Visit by Chief Executive, Woodland Trust – 26 February
- Speaker at ZSL event – 27 February
- E-NPOG meeting – 7 March
- RSPB Press day – 12 March TBC
- Hampshire Rural Forum meeting – 13 March
- Meeting with Savills – 14 March
- Forest Farming Group – 15 March
- FC Woodland Management event – 16 March
- Green Halo Steering Group – 20 March

5.4 Chairman's engagements

- NPE Board meeting – 25 January
- Visit by Defra – 26 January
- Meeting with Chairman, CDA – 1 February

- NFA presentation – 2 February
- RSPB press day – 12 March TBC
- Chairing meeting of the Future Farming Group – 15 March
- FC Woodland Management event – 16 March

6 Recommendation

To note the report.